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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to determine the extent to which the institution of content standards-driven curriculum in secondary English language arts and mathematics has led to student success on the California High School Exit Exam. The study tested the hypothesis that the increased focus on the alignment of English language arts and mathematics curriculum has had a positive impact on the passing scores of students who have been increasingly instructed with standards-based curriculum. Data were collected through survey questionnaires completed by English and Algebra teachers at two comprehensive and four alternative secondary schools and from school district and state records. A majority of site principals and the teachers surveyed concur that teachers are well prepared for the task of readying students for the California High School Exit Examination. Principals at the comprehensive sites agree that students have adequate knowledge of the exit exam and that the school sites and the district office are providing adequate knowledge of such facets as test components and testing dates to both students and parents. Alternative site principals do not entirely agree on this point. Teachers also generally agree that adequate activities and materials are provided for teachers who are responsible for preparing students for the exit examination. Teachers also believe the curriculum in use is either mostly or fully aligned with the academic content standards. Data from the administrations of the exit examination show that student scores are steadily rising. This is true for all students, including those in special-needs and English learner subgroups. It is important to note that scores for the subgroups are still lower than for the general population. Three appendixes contain the surveys and cover letters. (Contains 6 tables 38 references.) (SLD)

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THE CALIFORNIA HIGH SCHOOL EXIT EXAM: A BLUEPRINT FOR SUCCESS

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THESIS

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the requirements for the degree of

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Abstract

of

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A BLUEPRINT FOR SUCCESS

by

Donna L. Thayer

Statement of Problem:

The purpose of this study was to determine the extent to which the institution of content standards-driven curriculum in secondary English language arts and mathematics has led to student success on the California High School Exit Exam. The study will test the hypothesis that the increased focus on alignment of English language arts and mathematics curriculum has had a positive impact upon the passing scores of students who have been increasingly instructed with standards-based curriculum.

Sources of Data:

The study of related literature in Chapter 2 focused upon several derivations: among them were professional journals, education websites, local and statewide periodicals, publications from professional organizations such as the California Teachers Association and Association of California School Administrators, as well as documents produced by the California Department of Education. Virtually all resource materials were written within the last three years. In addition, several books authored by veteran educators were reviewed and analyzed for relevant data.

Data for the first two components of Chapter 3 was gleaned from survey questionnaires distributed to English 9, English 10, and Algebra 1 teachers at the two comprehensive and the four alternative secondary sites in the Folsom Cordova Unified School District. Data for the third component of Chapter 3, the analysis of the first three testing administrations of the California High School Exit Exam were obtained from the Testing and Assessment Office of the Folsom Cordova Unified School District and from the California Department of Education's DataQuest.

Conclusions Reached:

A majority of both site principals and those English language arts and Algebra I teachers concur that teachers are well prepared for the task of readying students for the California High School Exit Exam. Principals of comprehensive sites agree that students have adequate knowledge of the exit exam and that the school sites and the district office are providing adequate knowledge of such facets as test components and testing dates to both students and parents; alternative site principals do not entirely agree on this point. Principals also agree that teachers are being provided with at least adequate preparation for student instruction geared toward success on the CAHSEE. English 9, English 10, and Algebra I teachers generally agree that an adequate number of activities and materials are being provided to teachers who are responsible for preparing students for the exit exam. Teachers also believe that curriculum in use in their classroom, including textbooks, instructional and supplementary materials, are either mostly or fully aligned with the academic content standards. It is also evident from an analysis of the data from the administrations of the exit exam in the Folsom Cordova Unified School District from 2001-2003 that scores for all students are steadily rising. This is true for all students, including those in the special-needs and English learner subgroups. It is important to note, however, that scores for the subgroups are still lower than for the general population.

_____, Committee Chair
Dr. John Cotsakos

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

The current politically charged climate dominating California's K-12 education system bears witness to what is commonly known in educational and political circles alike as high-stakes testing. Identified as such because of the serious repercussions for students, schools and the entire educational system if exams are failed or scores do not meet minimum levels, high-stakes testing has surged to the forefront as a means of ensuring accountability of school districts in the development and implementation of area content standards. Foremost among the documents measuring student proficiency in the areas of English language arts and mathematics is the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE), first instituted in 1999 as a means of both improving student achievement in public secondary schools and ensuring that students are able to demonstrate grade- and content-specific competency in the areas of reading, writing, and mathematics. The CAHSEE is at once a controversial target of scrutiny and a well-meaning measurement of assessment. California is hardly a pioneer in the area of exit examinations for high school students; currently, 24 states have exit exams in place (Olson, 2003). Regardless, the CAHSEE has spurred debate among students, parents, educators, and policymakers who are ultimately responsible for the success or failure of this high-stakes accountability.

As public perception continues to drive the impact which such high-stakes testing as the CAHSEE has on secondary education, it is becoming increasingly important that

such measures of accountability be not only academically sound but also completely attuned to the "reality" of teaching; that is, they are true measures of what is actually being taught in the classroom. This is the objective of the CAHSEE, which has the distinction of being a testing measurement that is stringently aligned to the mathematics and English language arts content standards that have increasingly been incorporated into all curriculum and instruction beginning in the late 1990's.

However, the CAHSEE is not without its detractors. The test is opposed by such strong political groups as the California Teachers Association (CTA), which contends that the CAHSEE is an unfair tool being used to discriminate against students; it is, they argue, unrealistic to determine a high school student's graduation based upon success or failure with one test (Kerr, 2003). Further, the test has come under even closer scrutiny from school districts, special-interest groups such as the Association of California School Administrators (ACSA), teachers unions, and policymakers. A notable step amid the controversy is the State Board of Education's July 2003 decision to postpone the test as a graduation requirement for an additional two years. Thus, the class of 2004 will no longer be required to pass the CAHSEE in order to earn a high school diploma, and the class of 2006 has now become the target population for successful passage of the exam. The postponement has been generally applauded: "The class of 2004 has not yet had adequate opportunity to learn...since state education reforms have not been fully implemented." (State board opts, 2003, p.1). As a sobering reminder that students may not have yet been given the opportunity to gain knowledge and skills at a level of minimum competency, through the content area standards-driven curriculum upon which the CAHSEE is based, the postponement allows for further adoption and refinement of standards-based curriculum.

As it now stands, it has been determined that, although the test is a viable graduation requirement, it is too soon to expect students to have mastered all relevant

standards-based curriculum that is demanded by CAHSEE. (HumRRO, 2003).

One of the most hotly debated areas in today's educational arena is high-stakes testing such as the CAHSEE. Entire school systems are now being judged by such scores as the Academic Performance Index (API) and the student passage rate of the CAHSEE, which determines 90% of a school's Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). Therefore, administrators are being asked more so now than ever before to provide leadership for their staffs through professional development and curriculum design and implementation so that both teachers and students may approach such high-stakes tests as the CAHSEE with thorough preparation. Thus, this topic is both timely and invaluable in scope for those in the field of educational leadership as it delves into the field of testing and assessment.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study was to determine the extent to which the institution of content standards-driven curriculum in secondary mathematics and English language arts, the dependant variable, has led to student success on the California High School Exit Exam, the independent variable. The study will test the hypothesis that the increased focus on alignment of English language arts and mathematics curriculum has had a positive impact upon the passing scores of students who have been increasingly instructed with standards-based curriculum.

Significance of the Study

As testing and assessment continues to drive public perception of the success or failure of our public schools, and as students are being expected to master what is considered by most as "new curriculum" that has been completely aligned to recently

adopted content standards in both English language arts and mathematics, the topic of how well content area standards have been integrated into the secondary ELA classroom is not only timely but integral to the overall debate over the efficacy of such testing documents. California leads the nation in the implementation of standards-based curriculum and provides a plethora of educational materials, model curriculum guides and standards-aligned textbooks and other curriculum (O'Shea, 2002). This is vital to the overall efficacy of the CAHSEE, as a wealth of information about the testing document itself and the standards upon which it is based, is available to anyone seeking it out. As Aaberg (2002) contends, "There is enough information now about CAHSEE so that there should be no surprises for students or teachers when the test is administered" (p.1). If indeed the CAHSEE is to be regarded with the gravity which earmarks it as a valid graduation requirement for all high school students, then it must truly be an authentic measurement of the standards-based curriculum that forms the cornerstone of instruction and learning.

The study will, in addition, increase knowledge in the field of testing and assessment, as it contributes to a thorough and comprehensive review of the CAHSEE document, the latest studies done on its relevance and reliability, and its connection to subject area content standards and the aligned curriculum that drives instruction in secondary English language arts and mathematics. Rather than standing alone as a disjointed assessment tool that has no relation to content of classroom instruction, the CAHSEE should continue to be honed and refined so as to best fit the needs of all California high school students, including such high-risk groups as special needs students and English language learners. Furthermore, this study will enhance professional practice in the field of educational leadership as it directly relates to the efficacy of testing documents and their representation of the knowledge and skills being taught and the content standards that shape and guide the curriculum.

Methodology

Sampling Procedures

The setting in which the study took place is the Folsom Cordova Unified School District. Comprised of two quite disparate communities, the district encompasses both Rancho Cordova, a culturally diverse community that contrasts with the generally more affluent and less culturally diverse city of Folsom. Recently itself incorporated as a city, Rancho Cordova has for several years been the subject of a heated debate over what is termed a "district reorganization", as board members representing Folsom have tried to form two distinct districts. This author believes that equal representation of both communities was integral to the overall validity of the study, as Cordova and Folsom high schools serve two very different student clienteles. Perhaps not surprisingly, since the CAHSEE's first administration in March 2001, Folsom High School's passage rates have been significantly higher than those at Cordova High School. Relevant data on this point will be presented and analyzed in Chapter 3.

The population studied was the ninth and tenth grade English language arts and mathematics teachers at all secondary sites within the district: two comprehensive and four alternative sites. In addition, both principals at Cordova and Folsom high schools were included, as well as site principals from Kinney, Walnutwood, Mather Youth Academy, and Folsom Lakes alternative high schools. The sample of the population to be included in the study was comprised of all the respondents to a questionnaire that focuses upon specific curriculum and activities that the district has adopted in order to assist in teacher and student preparation for the CAHSEE.

Research Design

For the purposes of this study, both qualitative and quantitative research will be conducted. After a thorough study of the research and after a comprehensive study of CAHSEE scores for the past three years at all secondary sites throughout the district, it

was determined that the best form of instrumentation to use for the purposes of this study would be a questionnaire. Two surveys, one distributed to English 9, English 10, and Algebra I teachers at all comprehensive and alternative sites in the district will be distributed. In addition, a separate survey will be distributed to secondary principals at comprehensive and alternative sites.

The survey asks both teachers and site principals to assess the effectiveness of activities, materials and other modes of test preparation in their relation to student success on the CAHSEE. In addition, the survey asks teachers and principals to evaluate how completely and effectively curriculum in ninth and tenth grade English language arts and mathematics has been aligned to content standards and how this alignment affected student success on the CAHSEE. In addition, specific questions are designed to elicit feedback regarding general student knowledge of the CAHSEE, as well as suggestions for improvement in both site and district efforts to provide effective professional development and training geared toward student preparation for the exam.

Quantitative data on the first three test administrations of the CAHSEE in the Folsom Cordova Unified School District will be used in order to test the hypothesis that an increased in standards-based curriculum in secondary English language arts and mathematics has raised the student passage rate on the CAHSEE.

Data Collection and Recording

For the purposes of this study, data collection consisted of the responses gleaned from those teachers and site administrators who responded to the survey questionnaire described in the previous section. In addition, testing data from the administrations of the CAHSEE in March 2001, March 2002, and March 2003, obtained from the district's testing and assessment office, will be analyzed.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was accomplished by compiling data on the three administrations of

the CAHSEE from March 2001 to March 2003 for each secondary site within the Folsom Cordova Unified School District. Data gathered from the sample of the population, those respondents to the survey questionnaire, was also analyzed.

Definitions of Terms

Academic Performance Index (API). The baseline for measuring student achievement in public education. Content standards are used as the learning benchmark; scores on the California Standards Test and the California High School Exit Exam determine 90% of the API for secondary English language arts. The remaining 10% is placed on the norm-referenced Stanford Achievement Test (Stanford 9).

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). As determined by the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001, each state is mandated to develop and implement a system of accountability in order to ensure that all districts and schools make Adequate Yearly Progress. Required by 2014, all California school students will be performing at a level of proficiency in English language arts and mathematics.

California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE). First instituted in 1999, the California High School Exit Exam is the first examination of its kind in the state to test secondary English language arts and mathematics to a level of minimum competency. Students are required to pass the CAHSEE , which is based upon the content standards in both English language arts and mathematics, in order to earn a high school diploma.

Content standards. A common consensus concerning the body of educational knowledge all students should know and be able to exhibit.

No Child Left Behind (NCLB). The No Child Left Behind Act, enacted in 2001, was put into action in order to ensure equal, fair, and significant opportunity for all students to obtain an education of high quality and a level of proficiency with both state

academic standards and assessments.

Delimitations of Study

Delimitations have been set within the confines of those presented in the above-mentioned discussion of the population to be studied. Boundaries have been established to include ninth and tenth grade English language arts teachers at all secondary sites within the district, all mathematics at all secondary sites, and principals at both comprehensive high schools and all four alternative sites.

Although delimitations have been set within these boundaries, the study will have generalizability for all secondary schools in California, as the CAHSEE constitutes 90% of the Average Yearly Progress mandated by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. This study is of particular value to all secondary educators and administrators statewide, as the CAHSEE stands as the state's first mandated testing tool for high school graduation. As such, the pertinence of this study is both timely and valuable.

Organization of the Remainder of Study

The introduction, presented in Chapter 1, provides an overview of the study, as well as the statement of the problem and the significance of the study. In addition, organization and format in terms of methodology are also presented. A comprehensive literature review constitutes Chapter 2. Chapter 2's focus will be on the driving force of academic content standards in the educational arena as well as the emergence of a more authentic means of assessment tied to these standards; the evolution of the California High School Exit Exam as a tool of measurement, along with its social and political ramifications and its perception in the public eye. Finally, Chapter 2 will explore the correlation between the integration of academic content standards and CAHSEE scores. Chapter 3 explores the process of the survey proves, data collection, and analysis of the

data. Chapter 4 is the culminating discussion and analysis of conclusions reached and recommendations made.

Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter will focus on the literature to be reviewed divided into four main topics. To be examined first is the driving force of the development and implementation of academic content standards. Next will be an examination of the evolving connection between assessment in the California K-12 educational system as a means of establishing and maintaining consistency of curriculum and instruction and content standards. The third topic will examine the emergence of the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE) as a standards-based assessment in secondary English language arts and mathematics, including an analysis of the political and social perceptions and ramifications of the CAHSEE. Lastly, the chapter will review the connection between increased integration of content standards into the core curriculum and its relation to scores on the CAHSEE.

The purpose of this study was to determine the extent to which the implementation of content standards-driven curriculum in secondary mathematics and English language arts has led to student success on the CAHSEE. The study will test the hypothesis that the increased focus on alignment of English language arts and mathematics curriculum has had a positive impact on the passing scores of students who have been exposed to standards-based curriculum and instruction.

Content Standards: The Driving Force

They have become buzzwords among those who those who are even peripherally connected to education: academic content standards. Accountability has never been more crucial, as California's school districts invest vast amounts of money, time, and human resources in the adoption and alignment of standards; professional development for teachers who bear the sobering responsibility of mastering these standards and teaching to them; and textbooks and related curriculum that will bring about the desired results of higher test scores.

Although the terminology may seem trite, the terms "content standards" and "standards-driven" are relatively new terms in California's educational jargon, for the most part coming into the educational vernacular through Assembly Bill (AB) 265, the California Assessment of Academic Achievement Act of 1995. The bill required that academically rigorous content standards be developed and adopted in the core curriculum areas of reading writing, mathematics, history, social studies, and science for grades K-12 (*Statewide academic*, 1996). Shortly thereafter, Governor Gray Davis's administration invested nearly $2.5 billion in professional development, instructional materials, and a myriad of programs in the fledgling standards-based reform (Mazzoni, 2002). An additional $1.5 billion was spent in the late 1990's on reward, incentive, assistance and intervention programs for low-performing schools. In short, what the terms represent for California's students, parents, educators, and policymakers in terms of perceived success or failure of the K-12 educational system cannot and should not be dismissed.

The Purpose of Standards

According to a 1999 position paper prepared by the Standards Task Force of the Association of California School Administrators (ACSA), a standards-based system of instruction should have several key characteristics. Among them are their purpose of being "rigorous and internationally competitive" as well as "clear and readily understandable, and realistic in terms of instructional time and resources" (p. 4). Further, the ACSA Task Force set forth that standards should be representative of "periodic" benchmarks representative of grade level (i.e., grades 6-8 or grades 9-12), allowing for variations in the "sequence and timing of instructional content to accommodate availability of resources and the developmental needs of students" (p. 4).

Since 1992, 47 states have enacted content standards as a means of raising accountability of schools and students. Darling-Hammond (2002) contended that these new standards were put into place with the hopes that they would give birth to other reforms, including "high-quality frameworks and materials; course offerings that reflect this high-quality curriculum; assessments tied to the standards...and safety nets for educationally needy children" (p. 1). Thus, academic content standards were borne of an idealistic vision grounded in more rigorous teacher and student accountability and a more uniform and comprehensive platform from which to build a framework of student knowledge and skills.

Hoppe, Kirst, and Massell (1997) determined that the birth of content standards took place in the late 1980's, when state-level policymakers began a process of restructuring curriculum and instruction in light of the public's negative perceptions of

the ineffectualness of public education. Led by standards-based reform in such states as Kentucky and Maryland (Linn, 1998), this kind of systemic restructuring brought to the forefront policies that put into place more rigorous academic standards; policies that placed new standards upon testing, teacher certification, and accountability; and reconfigured local control to districts and teachers in the selection of programs enacted to meet these new standards (1997). Doherty (2003) determined that this standards-based reform movement includes "setting rigorous academic standards, measuring student progress against those standards, and holding students and educators accountable for meeting them" (p. 1). California's content standards, designed and adopted by the State Board of Education in 1998, are at the heart of this reform.

EdSource Online (2002) states that content standards specify a complete body of knowledge at an individual grade level. These standards theoretically balance both educators'and scholars' judgment regarding the level of rigor of these standards. Similarly, Mazzoni (2001) contends that these standards specify what students should know and be able to do and not only provide districts with a clear blueprint for curriculum and instruction but have paved the way for schools to initiate a more effective and meaningful means of assessment and testing.

Standards Adoption

By 1999, the SBE "had adopted statewide academic content standards in the four core curricular areas of English language arts, mathematics, history/social science, and science" (*Standards and Curriculum*, 2003, p. 3). In turn, these standards have formed the basis for the curriculum frameworks, which "outline the course of study for use by local school districts, guiding state and local textbook adoption processes..." (p. 3). As

the nation at large and California in particular worked to integrate these "uniformly high content standards" (p. 1) so, too, have educators and policymakers made great strides in aligning assessments to testing the knowledge and skills reflected in the standards.

Assessment: A Milestone

> As California's educational system began the heady task of developing and adopting uniform academic content standards in the late 1990's, so, too, did school districts and policymakers begin to forge a system that would forever alter the state's system of formal testing and assessment. This burgeoning focus on standards stemmed from an effort to improve schools by setting consistently high standards for student achievement". Also linked to systems of accountability, this new approach to assessment in public education carried with it specific key elements, among them the necessity for accountability for students and educators in relation to test performance. Likewise, this accountability has prompted in increase in interest in test quality and their link to what schools should be teaching.

Thus, a retooled assessment program supported by California educators providing a more streamlined connection between instruction and assessment was born. The social perception that without a consistent system of academic standards and a more equitable system of testing and assessment school systems fail its clientele set the tone for a testing program aligned to the standards which at this point were driving curriculum for grades 2-11. This connection between instruction and assessment is key. Tanner (2001) states the following:

> When one adopts the position that assessment ought to be a mechanism for improving teaching and learning, educational planning, instruction, and assessment all become connected, and there is an implicit message that they ought to be approached as a coherent whole. (p. 18)

This philosophy was the driving force behind is now seen as a seamless connection that binds teaching, learning, and assessment into a common whole.

Purposes of Assessment

Any discussion of assessment in education would not be complete if the reasons why it is done in the first place are not addressed. *Edsource* has determined that four predominant reasons exist for student assessment. The first is for the evaluation and improvement of an instructional program in general. Secondly, assessment is done in order to "diagnose individual student abilities and knowledge" (p. 2), then adapt instruction accordingly. Next, assessment determines individual student eligibility for promotion or graduation, college admission, or special honors. Lastly, assessment is important in the measurement and comparison of schools, districts, or states, or by national performance (*Assessment Overview*, 2003). Former Superintendent of Public Instruction Delaine Eastin stated in her final address at the Asilomar Curriculum and Instruction Symposium in February 2002 that "performance assessment should not be a dirty word" (Eastin, 2002, p. 1).

Standards and Assessment: The Connection

By the late 1990's, the philosophy that content standards and assessment should be irrevocably linked had become the guiding element in the national educational arena.

Ananda (2003) arrived at the following conclusion in a study on alignment and its connection to standards and assessment:

> Alignment… [is] the degree to which standards, assessment, and other important elements …are complementary and work together to effectively guide student learning. As such, the concept of alignment is intricately connected to test validity, because the notion that accurate inferences can be drawn from test assumes proper alignment of standards and assessment. (p. 18)

This author believes the most valid assessment is one that bears a direct link between assessment and the standards that drive curriculum and instruction. Lambert (1999) asserts that "it is important to clearly design assessment activities that arise directly from what the student should be learning, preferably from a school system's curriculum goals or standards…" (p. 10). She goes on to say that "assessments should be designed with the intention of determining the level of a student's achievement of the learning destination, of the exit learning goal" (p. 11).

Furthermore, Asp (1998) found that the most effective testing is that which is linked to student learning:

> Rather than being strictly a tool for accountability, assessment also helps define the knowledge and skills we want students to learn, and what we, as teachers, need to do help them learn it…The 'traditional' view of assessment begins with curriculum, followed by instruction and assessment in a linear fashion. The new paradigm is more recursive in nature, with curriculum, instruction, and assessment interacting and influencing one another. (p. 20)

This kind of assessment provides a much more accurate and valuable portrait of what students are genuinely learning, as evidenced by the connection of assessment to curriculum and instruction.

. ACSA contends that "there must be a match between the type of academic standard and the type of assessment used to measure it" (p. 14). This belief took hold and helped to mold the future of assessments that would be irrevocably linked to actual curriculum and instruction in classrooms throughout California. Yet to come amid this evolution of thought was a federal act that would create a radically different educational climate and set guidelines for accountability and equality for all students, not just in California, but nationwide.

Impact of No Child Left Behind.

There is little doubt that the political and social power behind the historical legislation set in place by the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 has had a profound impact on the establishment of uniform, rigorous content standards and assessment aligned to these standards. NCLB, a federal act that has at its core five basic tenets designed to improve the quality of education for all students in the United States, has spurred all states, including California, to work toward improvement of several facets of education. These components, called key performance standards, set the following goals for America's children:

> All students will be taught by highly qualified teachers by 2005-2006. All Students will attain proficiency in reading and mathematics by 2014, including students with disabilities and English learners. All English learners will become

proficient in English. All students will learn in schools that are safe and drug free. All students will graduate from high school. (*Background information*, 2003, p. 1)

For the purposes of this study, discussion will focus upon the performance standard that mandates that all students, including special needs students and English learners, will attain proficiency status in mathematics and reading by 2014. It has been determined that this standard will be addressed predominantly by the CAHSEE, as this test tests a minimum competency in the core subjects of English language arts (ELA) and mathematics. By so doing, California's compliance with the myriad provisions of NCLB encompasses the overhaul of standards-driven curriculum and instruction as well as a system of assessment that reflects this.

CAHSEE: A Measurement of Proficiency

Exit Exams: A Rationale

Chudowsky, Gaylor, Hamilton, and Kober (2002) determined that "states are adopting exit exams primarily to ensure that students graduate from high school with the knowledge and skills needed to do well in a job, in college, and other aspects of life" (p. 23). These exams began in the late 1970's and early 1980's, as minimum competency exams ensuring that students could read, write, and compute. Thus far, 27 states have exit exams in place (Smith & Smith, 2003), with California's test being administered for the first time in 2001.

It is widely believed that the standards-based movement that has swept the nation's educational landscape has had a large impact on the institution of these exams

(p. 23). Exit exams that are linked to both content standards and graduation requirements, as the CAHSEE is, have both validity and acceptability:

> The broader state movement of standards-based reform has revitalized the concept of exit exams and raised expectations beyond basic skills. Standards have given [exit exams] a more solid foundation…by clarifying what students should know and be able to do by the time they graduate from high school. And standards-based reform has elevated the significance of state tests at all grade levels. (p. 23)

In addition to a stricter adherence to content standards, exit exams in general have spurred much debate concerning their overall effectiveness in improving education and prompting an increase in student learning. A study by *EdSource* concluded that several benefits arise from the implementation of exit exams. Among them are increased student and teacher motivation; the promotion of consistency in student learning; better student preparation for post-secondary education and adult life; and increased support for the education system if the public sees gains in achievement on a yearly basis (*The California High*, 2003, p. 1). Chudowsky, et al. determined that exit exam proponents "view exit exams as a form of quality assurance, especially when they are tied to challenging state standards for what students should know and be able to do" (p. 24). Snipple (2002) contended that exit exams "have pushed students to a higher level of learning…for the majority of students, [they] are helping…" (p. 2). Furthermore, Jerald (2002) concluded that high school completion rates have risen in Texas since the implementation of exit exams in 1994, and that these exams have had a positive effect on teacher instruction: "When teachers know that students could be denied individual

diplomas, they're more likely to take an interest in the students' academic achievement" (Cavanaugh, 2002, p. 5).

The Birth of CAHSEE

The predominant purpose of the establishment of the CAHSEE was to create a set of more rigorous standards for high school graduation. Following the repeal of Education Code Section 51215 in 2000, "the Legislature indicated its intent to set "higher standards for high school graduation" (*Program Overview*, 2003, p. 1). For the purpose, the Legislature proposed the CAHSEE, its primary goal being to "significantly improve pupil achievement in high school and to ensure that pupils who graduate from high school can demonstrate grade level competency in reading, writing, and mathematics..." (Senate Bill 2, Section 1[b]). As a result, Education Code Section 60850 authorized the development and implementation of the CAHSEE in accordance with State Board of Education (SBE)-adopted content standards in English language arts and mathematics. In addition, the CAHSEE was developed in part through recommendations from the High School Exit Examination Standards Panel (p. 1).

Significant CAHSEE legislation.

California State AB 1609, passed in 2001, established important legislation that set parameters and guidelines for implementation of the CAHSEE. Among its many components, the bill disqualifies ninth graders from taking the CAHSEE. The bill also gave the SBE the authority to delay the passage date of the CAHSEE "if after reviewing an independent study the Board makes certain findings regarding the test development process or the status of standards-based instruction" (*CBSA study*, 2001, p. 2). This independent evaluation also determined funding for the CAHSEE be provided by the

Budget Act and specified that after August 1, 2003, the SBE "would have no further authority to delay the CAHSEE implementation date" (p. 3). In short, the evaluation concentrated on two main areas of focus: the test development process and the implementation of standards-based instruction.

Further legislation has affected the CAHSEE. Sponsored by the California Teachers Association, AB 356 was approved by a 7-4 vote by the Senate Appropriations Committee in August 2003. If approved by the Senate, the bill would require the SBE to explore alternative criteria that could be used to demonstrate a level of competency commensurate with the CAHSEE (Feldman, 2003).

In August 2003, it was determined that 65% of California's high schools failed to meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) as stipulated by No Child Left Behind, due in large part to their failure to meet the 95% participation rate on the CAHSEE (*EdCal,* 2003). As 90% of California's measurement of AYP is determined by the CAHSEE, this posed great problems for these districts. According to these districts, partial blame lay in a lack of awareness on their part that CAHSEE participation rates would affect AYP. The California Department of Education countered by stating their proposal that the rate be retroactively lowered from 95% to 90%, thus alleviating the strain on some districts (p. 3).

Guidelines for CAHSEE administration.

It has been determined that the CAHSEE can be administered only on specific dates determined by the State Superintendent of Public Instruction. The exam tests students in ELA through tenth grade and mathematics through Algebra I. Students are retested until both components are passed. Students take the test for the first time in the

spring semester of their tenth grade year, and are given five additional opportunities to retake the test if they are unsuccessful on their first attempt (p.1).

The CAHSEE was formally administered on a voluntary basis to about 350,000 California ninth graders in March 2001 (p. 1). Originally slated to be in place as a graduation requirement for the class of 2004, the SBE decided in July 2003 to postpone the passing of the CAHSEE until 2006. In its decision, the SBE determined that schools have not had ample opportunity to fully integrate state education reforms; thus, they should be given an additional two years in order to fully accomplish this (*State Board opts*, 2003, p. 1). This decision, supported by a majority of those in the educational system who uphold the CAHSEE as a meaningful and valid measurement of assessment, was applauded, as a majority held the belief that the CAHSEE was instituted before school districts had the chance to fully instruct students in content standards. ACSA contended that the CAHSEE is a meaningful assessment for students, teachers, and parents, but agrees that holding the class of 2004 accountable for the test is, at its best, unfair, and, at its worst, legally questionable (p. 1).

Furthermore, modifications were made to the ELA and mathematics test blueprints following the spring 2003 administration of the CAHSEE. The SBE voted to reduce the test-taking window from three to two days, eliminating the test day set aside for essay writing for the ELA test component. In addition, it was determined that writing genres not related to response to literary response be rotated, and that the number of test questions be adjusted or reduced on both the ELA and mathematics sections. (*EdCal*, 2002).

Major Components of CAHSEE

Designed by the American Institutes for Research (AIR) exclusively for California, the CAHSEE was field tested twice in 2000, once in the fall and once in the spring, on high school campuses throughout California. AIR "analyzed the data statistically to see how well the questions correlated with the specific content area they tested and whether the items operated in the same way for major subgroups" (*California's student testing*, 2001, p. 5). Based entirely upon the academic content standards that have gradually been incorporated into core curriculum since their inception in the late 1990's, the CAHSEE requires that students attain a minimum 60% score on the English language arts component and a minimum 55% score on the mathematics component. Test items on the ELA component cover word analysis, reading comprehension, literary response and analysis, writing strategies, writing conventions, and writing applications. The mathematics component contains test items on probability and statistics, number sense, algebra and functions, measurement and geometry, Algebra I and mathematical reasoning. Students take the test over a two-day period and must score "from 250 to 450 for each section, with a score of 350 or higher considered passing. Students must answer 55% of the questions correctly in English language arts to score 350 and pass each section" *(The California High*, 2003, p.1). Guidelines determined by the state require that districts allow students about three hours for the mathematics and about four hours for the ELA component of the CAHSEE. Technically, however, these are only guidelines; schools should allow students more time for the test if needed (p. 1).

Although it has been determined that the class of 2006 will be the first class in California to be held accountable for successful passage of the CAHSEE, the original passage mandate was for the class of 2004. Students from the class of 2004 and 2005

who have passed the CAHSEE will be awarded a certificate of accomplishment, as districts cannot now require these students to pass the test as a graduation requirement (p. 1).

What CAHSEE's Opponents are Saying

. Despite being determined to be a valid tool for use as a graduation requirement by the Human Resources Research Organization (HumRRO) in its May 2003 independent evaluation (Wise, Harris, Koger, Bacci, & Ford, 2003), detractors of the CAHSEE are stating loudly and clearly that serious drawbacks and complications accompany such high-stakes testing and could ultimately endanger student success. As the CAHSEE is still in its infancy as a testing document and as a graduation requirement, literature on the long-term ramifications of the CAHSEE as a measurement is limited. Nevertheless, this author has determined that of highest concern among educators, parents, and students is whether students already at risk, such as special needs students, those categorized as English learners, and students who already are categorized as low achievers, will have a fair and equal opportunity to pass the CAHSEE. Also of concern is whether the implementation of the CAHSEE will affect the dropout rate among low-achieving students. Available research does speak to these concerns as well as the short- and long-term consequences of this kind of high-stakes testing.

Olson (2003) determined that at least 20% of the class of 2004, the class originally slated to be held accountable to the test, would not graduate if they were required to pass the CAHSEE in order to earn their diplomas. This number would be in much higher proportion for classmates with disabilities or limited English skills. In general, opponents of exit exams pose several key arguments in their criticism of such

high-stakes testing. Among these are that exit exams consume instructional time and money that could be used elsewhere, and that they put pressure on teachers to focus on teaching "to the test," oftentimes, opponents argue, to the detriment of enrichment and creative activities or other areas of the curriculum (*EdSource*, 2003). In addition, detractors say that exit exams "lead to higher dropout rates among low-achieving students and those who have difficulty taking tests, particularly English learners and poor, disabled, and minority students" (p. 2). Further, critics argue that a student's graduation from high school should not be determined by success or failure on a single test. Why, it is argued, should a student be denied a high school diploma based upon one measurement of evaluation? In addition, opponents point out that exit exams in general measure only a relatively small amount of the knowledge and skills that a student should be taught in high school. Is it fair that he or she is denied a diploma based upon testing of only a limited scope of knowledge? These major points bring to light the most common arguments posed by exit exam opponents in general and critics of the CAHSEE in particular: its effects upon the dropout rate, students with disabilities, and English learners.

CAHSEE and the Dropout Rate.

According to the CDE, the June 2002 independent evaluation conducted of the CAHSEE revealed a lack of evidence "that the exit exam has affected grade retention, dropout rates, or students' post-secondary plans" (p. 2). However, a June 2002 study conducted by Cornell University of 108 school districts outside New York City revealed that nearly 30% of the principals and superintendents believe that the Regents test, New York's exit exam, was the cause of higher dropout rates in their districts. According to

these district- and site-level administrators, the number of dropouts was rising "in response to changes in 'learning and graduation' standards" (Cavanaugh, 2002, p. 3). Data gathered on the state's dropout rate verifies these fears, as the overall dropout rate rose from 5.3% for the 1996-97 academic year to 6.5% for the 2000-2001 year. Furthermore, those students transferring to equivalency programs from comprehensive high schools rose from 3.7% to 5.9% for the same time period.

Further studies mirror these findings. Krietzer, Madaus, and Haney (1989) concluded minimum competency exit exams were in place in states with the highest dropout rates, while at the same time states with the lowest dropout rates had no such exams. Catterral (1989) discovered a "causal connection" between exit exams and increasing dropout rates in his interviews of more than 700 students from four states with exit exams. He found that students were more inclined to doubt whether they would graduate from high school after initial failure of an exit exam (Chudowsky, et al., 2002). Jacob (2001) concluded that "achieving students in states with exit exams were about 25% more likely to drop out of high school than comparable peers in states without exit exams, [whereas] no such effect was found for higher achieving students" (Chudowsky et al., 2002, p. 35). Yet another study resulted in a similar conclusion: Griffin and Heidorn (1996) found that students with a relatively high grade point average who failed an exit exam were much more likely to drop out of school than students who had not (Chudowsky, et al.).

Although these studies may point to the exit exam as a cause for higher dropout rates, other research points in the opposite direction. Lillard and DeCicca (2001) determined that in states that implemented exit exams over a period of time that more

rigorous course requirements, not exit exams, had a more profound effect on student dropout rates. Jerald (2001) concluded that exit exams have actually had a positive effect on graduation rates, citing high school completion statistics in Texas since 1994. Perhaps most significant is the consideration of factors that lead to student dropout that are far removed from exit exams: student retention, high frequency of absences, low test scores and poor grades. Studies have also shown that ethnicity also plays a significant role, as Hispanics have a higher dropout rate than other races (Chudowsky, et al., 2002). Thus, this author contends that critics of exit exams should address these issues as they relate to student dropout rates before exit exams are arbitrarily condemned.

CAHSEE and Students with Disabilities.

A top area of concern is whether students with disabilities are given the same opportunity for success on the CAHSEE as students who are not. The statistics cannot and should not be ignored; a devastating 87% of disabled students failed the CAHSEE in its March 2002 administration (Asimov, 2002). Questions about the legality of the test and the available opportunities for remediation for students who already have high hurdles to overcome surround the controversy. Ironically, the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) which protects the rights of disabled individuals, "itself expresses the opinion that disabled students can benefit from higher expectations and standards" such as those set by an exit exam (Smith & Smith, 2001, p. 1). Accommodations must be made or alternative assessments provided when so specified in a student's Individualized Education Program or Section 504 plan, as mandated under the Rehabilitation Act. In 2002, 17 states that have exit exams in place provided such accommodations, with more states planning to do so (Chudowsky, et al.).

Thus far, at least one legal battle has been waged in California on behalf of students with disabilities. Chapman vs. the California Department of Education (2002) brought against the state on behalf of disabled students who would be denied diplomas unfairly by requiring these students to pass the CAHSEE in order to obtain a diploma. Students requested an emergency injunction; as a result, a federal judge ordered the following action:

> ...allow accommodations in testing procedures for students with disabilities. The judge also ordered the state to develop an alternative form of the test for students who cannot be appropriately assessed by a standardized test. The suit contended that an alternative method of assessment should be available to these students. (p. 57)

This ruling marked the first time that a state was ordered to modify a high school exam in order to accommodate learning disabled students. Thus, a precedent has been set to pave the way for other students who are learning disabled to challenge the CAHSEE.

It is important to point out, however, that in its 2003 independent evaluation of the CAHSEE, HumRRO concluded that CAHSEE meets all applicable standards for testing students with disabilities that are in place for test development and use by the American Educational Research Organization, the American Psychological Organization, and the National Council on Measurement in Education that designate it for use as a high school graduation requirement (Wise, et al., 2003).

CAHSEE and English learners.

Data collected from the March 2001 administration of the CAHSEE by the California School Boards Association (CSBA) reveals alarming statistics regarding the challenges facing English learners who must pass the CAHSEE in order to graduate. According to the study, only 30% of the English learners tested that year obtained a passing score on the ELA component of the CAHSEE and just 17% of the group passed the mathematics component. (*California High School*, 2003). In comparison to other students grouped according to ethnicity and other factors, this is a startling statistic; in comparison, 82% of white students passed the ELA section and 64% passed the math portion of the test that year.

Critics contend that CAHSEE's playing field is not level for those students whose first language is not English. However, NCLB requires that students of limited English proficiency be included in such assessments as the CAHSEE. Some states offer accommodations for English learners, but, as of 2002, California was not included among the states who offer graduation options for English learners.

Perhaps not surprisingly, an exit exam in at least one other state has been challenged on behalf of English learners. Florida's exit exam, the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT), was cancelled in spring 2003 for those students who are not fluent in English. The plan allows students whose native language is not English to "earn a diploma if they have a 2.5 grade point average and have been enrolled in English-language classes for less than two years" (Richard, 2003, p. 1). Said Senator Frederica Wilson of the bill that prompted this legislation, "'You cannot use one single assessment to measure the success or failure of each individual child'" (p. 6). However, research

indicates that there are advantages to inclusion of English students in mandated testing such as the CAHSEE. Rivera and Standsfield (1998) found that including English learners in such testing would ultimately be advantageous:

> Inclusion in the testing program in the testing program helps to remind districts and schools that [English learners] will need to receive at least the same quality and the same amount of content instruction as is given the other students...This is particularly important as schools move forward implementing instruction based on high standards of learning...If ELLs are to benefit from standards-based reform, they must be included in district and state required assessment. (p. 68)

Rivera and Standsfield also point out that students who fare poorly on such tests as the CAHSEE are in line to receive remediation and intervention instruction so that a subsequent attempt of the test will prove successful. If student groups such as English learners are excluded from testing, they may not receive the educational intervention that could be critical to their success (p. 67).

Finally, it is important to note that HumRRO's independent evaluation found that the CAHSEE does not provide an unfair testing situation for English learners. In this case, section 9 of the testing standards, regarding testing individuals of diverse linguistic backgrounds, was of particular interest in the evaluation. Standard 9.1, which states that testing should "be designed to reduce threats to the reliability and validity of test score inferences that may arise from language differences" (Wise, et al., p. 29), was found to be upheld, as all CAHSEE test questions are reviewed for fairness and sensitivity for various groups and for reading level requirements.

Content Standards Implementation and CAHSEE

CAHSEE's Impact on Learning

Evidence of whether the implementation of exit exams increases student learning is contradictory at best. The Center on Education Policy's study of the research in this area revealed, for example, no correlations between student performance on exit exams and other testing, such as the SAT or Advanced Placement exams, for graduating seniors. Although research conducted by Bishop (2001) utilizing data gathered from international schools seemed to reveal that high school exit exams do increase student learning, exit exams in overseas schools use different criteria, such as multiple assessments, than exit exams in the United States, which are mostly designed as pass-fail testing documents (Chudowsky, et al.).These differences could make the results even more contradictory.

Linn (1998) set forth that research indicates that higher test scores are not necessarily synonymous with higher student achievement. It is his contention that standards-based assessments such as the CAHSEE have no more impact on student learning than other testing reforms from the past.

It remains to be seen whether the institution of the CAHSEE has a positive effect on learning among high school students in California. As the test is still in its infancy and is still being retooled by policymakers, it truly remains a work in progress. Hence, the long-term ramifications, including the test's effect on how effectively students are learning, must be analyzed as data becomes available.

Connection Between CAHSEE and Content Standards

Because the CAHSEE has only been in effect since 2001, and because its requirement as a mandate for a high school diploma has been postponed until 2006,

limited research has been done on the connection between the integration of academic content standards and passing scores on the CAHSEE. HumRRO's independent evaluation, released in May 2003, offers the best evidence that the implementation of content standards in ELA and mathematics on the secondary level has had a directly positive effect on CAHSEE scores.

In effect, HumRRO determined that a more thorough "coverage of the California Content Standards in the middle-grade feeder schools and the coverage of the specific standards assessed by the CAHSEE at the high school level has increased steadily over the past four or five years" (Wise, et al., p. 85). Data released on CAHSEE scores through January 2003 indicate that this is true. All groups tested, including students targeted as economically disadvantaged, English learners, and special education, have shown a rise in test scores since the test was first administered in March 2001. Cumulative passing rates have risen from about 50% to just over 80% in less than two years. This is encouraging data for educators, students, and policymakers who uphold the CAHSEE as an important measurement of assessment for high school graduation.

In fact, one of the significant general findings of the HumRRO report is that the institution of the CAHSEE has had a profound effect on standards-based instruction:

> The CAHSEE requirement has been a major factor leading to dramatically increased coverage of the California Content Standards at both the high school and middle school level and to development or improvement of courses providing help for students who have difficulty mastering these standards. (p. 92)

As determined by HumRRO, there has also been an increase in the number of remedial and supplemental courses being taught to close the gap for students who are in

need of remediation. According to the report, the increase in these courses also includes two at-risk groups: English learners and special needs students. This author believes this to be a heartening determinant of whether or not the CAHSEE will hold strong as a legitimate testing document.

Furthermore, it has been determined that in the last four years, coverage of content standards in high school classrooms has risen steadily. In 1999, about 20% of schools reported in the HumRRO evaluation were covering 75% of the content standards. By 2003, more than 80% of the schools were reporting at least that percentage. Cox (2003) reported that 100% of the schools with a high level of standards coverage reported passage rates of 75% or higher. Conversely, just 59% of schools with a lower level of standards implementation had passage rates at a concurrent level. Certainly, this bodes well for both the future of standards-based instruction in California's schools and for its continued impact on student performance on the CAHSEE. Furthermore, it was suggested that "passing rates [on the CAHSEE] will improve for the classes of 2005 through 2008, several years after significant increases in coverage of the standards" (p. 85). It remains to be seen, as data from the March 2003 administration melds into the data from 2004 administration dates and beyond, if this trend will continue. Data seems to indicate that this will be the case. If so, this author asserts that the CAHSEE will be highly regarded as an assessment of sound educational integrity.

Rationale for the Study

The recent focus in California on high-stakes testing brought about by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 and the ancillary standards-based assessment borne of this

historic legislation bring with them specific responsibilities on the part of policymakers and educators who have enacted this systemic reform. If a test such as the California High School Exit Exam, which carries serious long- and short-term ramifications for secondary students, is to be seen as a fair, equitable and valid measurement of student knowledge and skills, it must be just that: an accurate reflection of the content standards that are just now being implemented into secondary curriculum.

It is imperative, therefore, that a comprehensive study be done of the correlation between these academic content standards and scores on the CAHSEE within the framework of secondary English language arts and mathematics in the Folsom Cordova Unified School District. Although some research has been conducted on a state level of the relationship between integration of content standards in these areas and CAHSEE scores, a more intimate look at a district's experience and viewpoints is both significant and valuable.

Summary

The predominant research conducted for this paper has laid the groundwork for a comprehensive understanding of the movement that has swept California's educational landscape. The institution of academic content standards into the K-12 educational system in 1999 and the subsequent development and implementation of an interconnected high school graduation requirement in the form of the California High School Exit Exam have spearheaded a major systemic reform of all facets of curriculum design and development, teaching practices, and the procedures of testing and assessment, as well as all related student and teacher accountability. These reforms have imbued these

components of the educational forum with far-reaching ramifications and consequences for students, teachers, and the state's policymakers.

Spurred in large part by No Child Left Behind's mandate of Average Yearly Progress, the measurement that acts as a barometer of a school's performance based upon student achievement data, the CAHSEE is forcing the hand of social promotion and the perception of a high school diploma as a meaningless document. Begun in 1999, CAHSEE tests students at a minimum competency in English language arts and mathematics at the tenth grade level. As a valid measurement of specific standards of what a student knows and is able to do, the CAHSEE is still undergoing growing pains, having been revised in 2003 to better accommodate testing conditions and parameters.

Although the CAHSEE's equity is currently in question for such high-risk groups as English learners and special needs students, and a modicum of data from other states exists that exit exams have a detrimental effect on student dropout rates, most research indicates that the CAHSEE is a valid assessment tool. Indications are that the test is both beneficial to student learning and indicative of the efficacy of a standards-based program of curriculum and instruction. In addition, what research has been conducted thus far indicates that the institution of the CAHSEE has led to more thorough and comprehensive implementation of the content standards that form the cornerstone of the CAHSEE.

As the CAHSEE has yet to be viewed as a tried and true measurement of student knowledge and skills, its evolution is being closely monitored and guided by policymakers and educational leaders. It is for many reasons a watershed in the history of

California's testing and assessment system, as it can and should stand as an authentic gauge of student performance.

Chapter 3

DATA ANALYSIS

The purpose of this study was to determine the extent to which the implementation of content standards-driven curriculum in secondary mathematics and ELA has led to student success on the CAHSEE. The study was conducted in order to test the hypothesis that the increased focus on alignment of ELA and mathematics curriculum has had a positive impact on the passing scores who have been exposed to standards-based curriculum and instruction.

Data gathered and analyzed for this paper will be presented in three distinct components. The first strand is qualitative data drawn from a principal survey questionnaire, the audience for which was principals from the two comprehensive secondary sites in the district and from the four alternative sites. This author considered it imperative that administrator feedback and opinions be tapped, as administrators are important stakeholders in the ultimate success or failure of standards-based curriculum and its relation to the CAHSEE. The questionnaire asked for feedback and opinions regarding the CAHSEE, including teacher and student awareness of the test, as well as individual perceptions on teacher preparation, student preparation and general success rates of the CAHSEE in connection with integration of ELA and mathematics content standards.

The second strand of data was gathered using a survey questionnaire for a teacher population composed of ninth and tenth ELA and mathematics teachers from all secondary sites in the district. This author elected to survey a specific population whose curricular focus centers upon content standards upon which the CAHSEE is based: English 9, English 10, and Algebra 1 teachers. This population was surveyed regarding teacher attitudes and opinions about the correlation between success on the CAHSEE and standards-driven curriculum being used in their classrooms.

As the subject at hand is the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE), which is at this point a relatively new testing measurement both in its development and implementation, and the academic content standards upon which the test is based, the final strand of the data collection is quantitative in nature. Encompassing the three years that the CAHSEE has been administered in the Folsom Cordova Unified School District, this data covers three initial administrations of the CAHSEE: March 2001, March 2002, and March 2003. This data includes the statistics for passing rates for all major groups (i.e., all tenth graders in the Folsom Cordova Unified School District), as well as subgroups for those student populations considered to be at risk with the CAHSEE: special needs students and English learners.

Principal Survey

Major Components

Of the six surveys distributed to secondary site principals in the Folsom Cordova Unified School District, four were returned: two from Cordova and Folsom high schools and from two alternative sites, Kinney and Walnutwood high schools. The survey was composed of 11 items divided into three main sections. The first section asked principals for general information about their campuses, including student population totals and numbers of certificated personnel. The second section was comprised of six items focusing on the site's specific educational programs and its curricular offerings as well as curricular alignment in the ELA and mathematics classes to the content standards.

Content standard findings.

The section of the questionnaire that dealt with content standards revealed much encouraging information that bodes well for the implementation of curriculum instruction aligned to content standards, and, thus, effective and thorough student preparation for the CAHSEE. A portion of the information gleaned from both principal and teacher surveys will be presented in tabular format with an analysis of major findings following each table, while a portion of the findings will be presented and analyzed in narrative form.

Table 1

The Following Efforts Have Been Made at a Site or District Level to Implement ELA and Mathematics Content Standards

Offerings to ELA/Mathematics teachers:	Comprehensive Site:	Alternative Site:
Professional development at site/district level	Yes	Yes
Off-site professional development workshops/conferences	No	No
Development of pacing guides that align curriculum to content standards	Yes	Yes
Purchase of curriculum aligned to ELA/mathematics standards	Yes	Yes
Development of new curriculum aligned to ELA/mathematics standards	Yes	Yes
Alignment of existing curriculum to ELA/mathematics standards	Yes	Yes
Implementation of consistent grade-level meetings for ELA/mathematics teachers	Yes	No

Table 1 indicates that there is much positive activity at the comprehensive and alternative high schools in the alignment of ELA and mathematics content standards to curriculum. Much of the work that has been done in the development and implementation of curriculum based upon the ELA and mathematics content standards will benefit those students who must be instructed in this standards-based curriculum in order to be successful on the CAHSEE. In addition, new curriculum has been integrated into existing curriculum to further bolster the repertoire of curricular resources available to teachers.

Furthermore, the data indicates that the district is taking measures to ensure that teachers are being provided with professional development opportunities that will prepare teachers for student preparation of the CAHSEE. Conversely, data indicates a lack of grade-level meeting time for ELA and mathematics teachers at alternative sites; however, ELA and mathematics teachers at the comprehensive sites are being afforded opportunities to meet with teachers of the same grade level in order to share curriculum, discuss testing, best practices, and so on.

When asked how effective these endeavors of curricular alignment and professional growth and training opportunities have been in a thorough and effective implementation of ELA and mathematics standards, the principal at one of the two comprehensive high schools in the district stated that they have been "very effective" for ELA and "somewhat effective" for math. One principal at an alternative site rated efforts for both ELA and mathematics teachers as "highly effective", saying that ""All instructors are utilizing standards-based curriculum in both ELA and math." Another alternative site principal rated the efforts as "somewhat effective."

Principals were also asked their opinion on how completely ELA and mathematics content standards have been integrated into the curriculum. The principals of Cordova High School and Walnutwood High School, a continuation site, stated that standards have been completely integrated, while principal of Kinney High School, another alternative site, stated that standards have been partially integrated into his campus's ELA curriculum and completely integrated into the mathematics curriculum.

These findings would indicate that a lack of consistency exists in the implementation of content standards throughout the district.

Principals were also asked to rate how thoroughly ELA and mathematics teachers at their sites have "bought in" to the implementation standards-based curriculum and to support their responses. Alternative principals stated, "All recognize the need to implement standards-based curriculum, and with the help of district lead teachers have done so" and "Most of the…staff has bought into the implementation of standards-based curriculum. We have modified the curriculum a little to meet the needs of an alternative school." A principal at a comprehensive school stated that "teachers understand the importance of a standards-based curriculum and are working to implement it."

CAHSEE findings.

Table 2 indicates the level of student awareness of the CAHSEE and its ramifications for their future success. A narrative discussion of awareness of the CAHSEE among the parents and faculty, asked in a separate survey item, follows.

Table 2

How Aware are Students at Your School Site about the California High School Exit Exam?

Level of Awareness:	Comprehensive Site:		Alternative Site:	
	Yes:	No:	Yes:	No:
They know nothing about the exam.	0	2	0	2
They have only general information about the exam.	0	2	1	1
They are aware of the knowledge and skills that are covered on exam.	2	0	1	1
They are aware that content standards are linked to the CAHSEE.	2	0	1	1
They are aware of testing dates.	2	0	1	1
They know how many times they are allowed to retake the test if they fail the first time.	2	0	1	1
Beginning with the class of 2006, they know they must pass the CAHSEE in order to receive a high school diploma.	2	0	2	1

Table 2 clearly indicates a variation between the comprehensive sites and at least one of the district's alternative sites regarding their views of student perception of the CAHSEE. Both comprehensive principals agreed that not only do students at their sites

have general knowledge of the test, but they are aware that content standards are linked to the CAHSEE and that they will have multiple opportunities to pass the CAHSEE. In addition, both comprehensive administrators stated that students are aware of the testing dates.

In contrast, one alternative principal stated that his student population has only general knowledge about the CAHSEE and that they are aware that, beginning with the class of 2006, they must pass the CAHSEE in order to graduate. The other alternative respondent revealed that students on his campus have more complete knowledge of the CAHSEE, including content standard correlation, testing dates, and re-testing opportunities.

In addition, principals at both comprehensive and alternative sites indicated that parents are aware of the CAHSEE. One principal stated that "parents seem very aware [of the CAHSEE]. They are concerned that their kids won't get their diploma, especially special education parents." Another stated that parents are sent letters regarding CAHSEE administration. One alternative site principal offered the following comment regarding parent awareness of the CAHSEE: "Every new student and parent who is enrolling [at the school] is required to attend an enrollment conference. During that conference, we inform parents about the CAHSEE." Another said, "Because of district, site, and media emphasis, we believe that most parents are very well aware. We don't have any parents who express surprise." Factors that have contributed to increased student and faculty awareness are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

The Following Factors Have Contributed to Increased Awareness of the CAHSEE among the Faculty and Student Body

Contributing Factors to Increased Awareness of the CAHSEE :	Comprehensive Site:		Alternative Site:	
	Yes:	No:	Yes:	No:
Increased communication at district office level	2	0	1	1
Increased communication at site level	2	0	1	1
Increased school-to-home communication at either district or site level	1	1	2	0
Increased coverage in the news media	1	1	1	1
Alignment of content standards to ELA and mathematics curriculum	2	0	2	0
Test preparation in ELA/mathematics classroom	2	0	2	0
School-wide test preparation	2	0	0	2

Table 3 indicates that an increased level of communication on both comprehensive and alternative campuses has led to increased student awareness of the CAHSEE. In addition, all respondents indicated that test preparation in both ELA and mathematics, as well as alignment of curriculum to content standards in the same areas has increased student knowledge of the CAHSEE. Discrepancies exist among high schools concerning whether an increase in school-to-home communication or increased

media coverage has led to increased student awareness. Similarly, there is disagreement about whether school-wide test preparation for the test has made a difference in student awareness of the test.

It appears that alternative principals agreed that both faculty and student body at individual sites currently have more awareness of the CAHSEE than in its inception in spring 2001. Asked to cite reasons for this, administrators offered varied responses. One alternative administrator said, "The class of 2004 became very aware of the exam, especially when they thought it was going to be a requirement for graduation." Another said, "Certainly [awareness increased about the CAHSEE] due to emphasis by district, site, media, and every instructor." Comprehensive administrators agreed, citing the onslaught of publicity about the CAHSEE in the media as the deadline for the class of 2006 approaches, as well as more discussion in faculty and departmental meetings as reasons for increased CAHSEE awareness.

Finally, administrators were asked to compare their site's March 2003 performance with previous performances, and to discuss their opinions regarding increased or decreased CAHSEE scores. All cited increased performance in both ELA and mathematics, although one alternative site does not offer Algebra 1, and so does not offer the necessary curriculum to prepare students for the mathematics component of the CAHSEE. Folsom High School's CAHSEE scores rank second-highest in Sacramento and surrounding counties, while Cordova High School's have risen but not nearly to a commensurate degree. All sites contend that students perform better on the ELA than on the mathematics component, a trend that is mirrored throughout the state.

Summary of Principal Survey Findings

Results of the principal survey indicate a deliberate and consistent effort in alignment of content standards to ELA and mathematics curriculum on the secondary level in the Folsom Cordova Unified School District. These efforts range from alignment of existing curriculum to the standards, adoption of new curriculum, professional development for ELA and mathematics teachers to the development and implementation of specific documents such as pacing guides that guide teachers in student instruction for the CAHSEE. These findings are consistent with the research conducted by this author, which revealed that California schools have moved closer to a full adoption and use of standards-based curriculum and instruction since the inception of the CAHSEE in 2001.

In addition, findings indicate that the majority of secondary principals believe that students and parents are more fully aware of the CAHSEE now than at its inception in 2001, in large part due to such factors as media coverage, site and district-level communication, as well as the connection made by teachers and administrators between ELA and mathematics content standards and the CAHSEE. One alternative site takes this a step further by requiring students and parents to attend an enrollment conference, one of the topics of which is the CAHSEE. Generally speaking, data indicates that efforts made in alignment of contents in the areas of English language arts and mathematics on the secondary level have increased dramatically since the inception of the CAHSEE in 2001 and that faculty and both site and district administration are working in tandem to both

fully integrate standards-based curriculum and to help students be successful on the CAHSEE.

Teacher Survey

Major Components

For the purposes of data collection and analysis regarding the extent to which content standards have been integrated into ELA and mathematics curriculum and how that integration has affected student passage rates on the CAHSEE, a survey was distributed to all English 9 and 10 teachers at both comprehensive and all four alternative secondary sites in the Folsom Cordova Unified School District. The survey asked ninth and tenth ELA teachers and those mathematics teachers who teach Algebra 1 to respond to a 12-item questionnaire, asking for separate rankings selected from predetermined responses, as well as specific written feedback and opinions.

Of the 14 questionnaires distributed to ninth and tenth grade ELA teachers throughout the district (six to teachers at Cordova High, six to Folsom High teachers, and one to the ELA teacher at each alternative site who teaches English 9 and 10), ten, or 71% of the surveys, were returned. Of the 14 questionnaires distributed to Algebra 1 teachers throughout the district (following the same guidelines for distribution as were followed for the ELA teachers), eight, or 57%, were returned. Respondents represent both comprehensive high schools and two of the four alternative high schools in the district and cover both ELA and mathematics teaching positions adequately.

The data was analyzed for both predetermined responses and for individual comments and feedback. The rankings from the three predominant survey items will be presented in tabular form with discussion and analysis following each table. When appropriate, a narrative discussion and analysis of certain items will be discussed and analyzed.

Curriculum Alignment to Content Standards

All ELA and mathematics teachers were asked three general questions regarding their curriculum and classroom instruction as it relates to content standards. One hundred per cent of the ELA teachers from one of the comprehensive high schools surveyed, Cordova High School, reported that the textbooks they use in their classrooms have been aligned to content standards, although two of the respondents stated that only "some" of their textbooks have this alignment. Seven of the ten ELA respondents claim that supplemental materials they use are aligned to the content standards; three say they are not. It is noteworthy that teachers who claim their materials are not standards-aligned are from Folsom High School and from Folsom Lake High School, one of the district's alternative sites.

Conversely, of the eight mathematics teachers who responded to the survey, just three claimed that their textbooks and materials are aligned to content standards. Again, there seems to be a discrepancy between high schools, as Folsom High School teachers contend their textbooks and materials are fully aligned to content standards; Cordova High and the alternative sites, claim textbooks are either not or only partially aligned to content standards.

In addition, teachers were asked to address the following question: "I spend the following number of hours per week instructing my students using curriculum that has been specifically aligned with the California ELA or mathematics content standards." Eight of the ten ELA respondents claim that they spend three-plus hours per week in standards-based instruction. Two of the ten ELA respondents stated that they spend two to three hours of class time weekly addressing content standards in their curriculum. On the other hand, 100% of the mathematics instructors who responded claim that they spend three-plus hours in standards-based instruction in their classrooms.

CAHSEE Preparation

The second component of the survey asked ELA and mathematics teachers to relate their opinions and attitudes regarding student and teacher preparation for the CAHSEE. Table 4 indicates the activities and materials that teachers have been provided by the Folsom Cordova Unified School District so that teachers are prepared to provide students with the necessary knowledge and skills to pass the CAHSEE. These activities range from off-campus workshops and conferences, district-sponsored professional development opportunities related to the CAHSEE, as well as materials such as student study guides, teacher guides, and other curriculum aligned to content standards and, thus, pertinent to CAHSEE preparation.

Table 4

These Activities/Materials Have Been Provided so Teachers May Best Serve Students in Preparation for the CAHSEE

Activities/Materials	ELA Teachers		Mathematics Teachers		Total:
	Yes:	No:	Yes:	No:	
Professional workshops/conferences	9	1	1	7	18
Test preparation material	10	0	2	6	18
Curriculum designed for CAHSEE test preparation	10	0	4	4	18
Student study guides/activities geared toward CAHSEE	10	0	4	4	18
Teacher guides provided by county office of education, department of education, etc.	10	0	4	4	18
District-sponsored workshops/professional development	10	0	4	4	18

Table 4 indicates that, according to the English 9, English 10 and Algebra I survey respondents, more attention has been paid to CAHSEE preparation for ELA students than for mathematics students. For example, all ELA teachers who responded to the survey contend that specific curriculum and materials geared toward student preparation for the CAHSEE has been provided by the district for their implementation. These materials include pacing plans which align all curriculum in reading, writing, vocabulary development, literary response and analysis, and speaking and listening; study guides provided by the district or an outside organization such as the county office of

Education, as well as other specially designed curriculum. Conversely, just one in eight mathematics teachers claim to have been provided the opportunity to attend professional conferences or workshops on the CAHSEE; four of the eight mathematics teachers claim to have been provided with teacher guides, student study guides, and other CAHSEE-related curriculum. This discrepancy would indicate a lack of continuity among sites, as both comprehensive and alternative sites are represented in the survey.

Table 5 addresses results for a question asking ELA and mathematics teachers to gauge student preparation for the CAHSEE. While not grounded in data, teachers' opinions and feedback regarding student success on the CAHSEE is an integral component of determining the efficacy of the test.

Table 5

As an ELA or Mathematics Teacher, How Well do you Think Students are Being Prepared for Success on the California High School Exit Exam?

How well are your students being prepared for the CAHSEE?	English Language Arts Teachers	Mathematics Teachers
Not at all prepared	0	0
Not well prepared	2	2
Prepared	4	3
Well prepared	4	3

Table 5 indicates that ELA teachers, for the most part, feel that their students are well prepared for the CAHSEE. This response reveals that the standards-based curriculum that forms the basis of most or all of the ELA curriculum is proving to be of great benefit for student preparation of the CAHSEE. Teachers elaborated on this topic, stating, "This impression is based on my collaboration with other English teachers as well as on my observation of the skills being taught to my two children in the same district." An ELA teacher who works with at-risk students at Folsom Lake High School said, "At the continuation high school, students are frequently, by definition, experiencing school failure. I believe I see a group of students who are prepared to pass the CAHSEE, or have already passed it, in spite of failing grades in English. I do also see that cohort of students for whom the system is a total failure. These students' lack of preparation stems from their early elementary [experiences]." Another alternative ELA teacher, who works with students who have the most severe discipline problems, said, "We don't usually see the student who succeeds in school here for very long. I do think that our district is preparing the bulk of the students, though."

On the other hand, the responses of the mathematics teachers spanned a bit more into the negative areas of student preparation for the CAHSEE. Unfortunately, mathematics respondents did not elaborate on their responses as effusively as did the ELA teachers.

Summary of Teacher Survey Findings

Based upon the results of the survey distributed to ninth and tenth grade ELA and Algebra I teachers in the Folsom Cordova Unified School District, it can be determined that ELA teachers at both the comprehensive and alternative sites believe that curriculum and instructional materials currently in use has been, at the very least, satisfactorily aligned to the content standards which drive the CAHSEE. A majority of these teachers also contend that textbooks and supplemental materials used for curriculum delivery and instruction are, at the very least, aligned to content standards. These materials include standards-aligned, grade-level pacing guides, test preparation materials designed specifically for both teachers and students, and professional guides designed by such organizations as the California Department of Education and the Sacramento County Office of Education. These teachers also believe that, for the most part, they have been provided with adequate opportunities for professional growth and development that will enhance their ability to fully prepare students for the CAHSEE.

In addition, the majority of both ELA and mathematics teachers at both comprehensive and alternative sites believe that students are either being prepared or well prepared for the CAHSEE. Teachers supported these views, stating that even those students considered at-risk will be prepared to pass the CAHSEE.

CAHSEE Administrations: 2001-2003

As the focus of this study is the correlation between the alignment of ELA and mathematics content standards to curriculum and student success on the CAHSEE, the data from the first three administrations of the CAHSEE must be analyzed. It is of paramount importance to determine the impact that standards-based curriculum has had on passing rates on the CAHSEE.

The review of related literature in Chapter 2 determined that the increased coverage of content standards in secondary ELA and mathematics classroom has led to higher passing rates for students who are being instructed with standards-driven curriculum. Thus, it would stand to reason that tenth graders taking the test for the first time in March 2003 would perform at a higher rate than those tenth graders who took the test in March 2001, the first administration of the CAHSEE in California. The following table and its accompanying narrative will verify if this is the case.

Table 6 will present data from the three administrations of the CAHSEE, from 2001 to 2003, representing all students in the Folsom Cordova Unified School District. The table also will present data broken down by language fluency, and special education program participation, the major subgroups discussed and analyzed in the literature review. This data is valuable in the determination of whether or not the integration of academic content standards into secondary ELA and mathematics curriculum in the Folsom Cordova Unified School District has in fact raised the pass rate of students attempting the CAHSEE for the first time.

Table 6

Data for First Three Testing Administrations of the CAHSEE of the Folsom Cordova Unified School District

Year Tested:	Grouping:	Number Tested: ELA	Number Passed: ELA	% Passed: ELA	Number Tested: Math	Number Passed: Math	% Passed: Math
2001	All Students	1,186	911	77%	1,173	657	56%
	Special Education	128	51	40%	126	14	11%
	English Learners	101	16	16%	96	14	15%
2002	All Students	282	124	44%	525	158	30%
	Special Education	58	11	19%	90	8	9%
	English Learners	81	15	19%	94	22	23%
2003	All Students	1,198	1,014	85%	1,228	838	68%
	Special Education	97	45	46%	104	18	17%
	English Learners	108	39	36%	110	44	44%

Table 6 clearly indicates a rise in passage rates for all students from 2001 to 2003, the most recent administration of the CAHSEE. The passage rate for the Folsom Cordova Unified School District has risen from 77% to 85% between 2001 and 2003. While the passage rate seemed to plummet in 2002, the second year of the CAHSEE, it must be remembered that those students who took the CAHSEE that year were the ones who had not successfully passed it in 2001, as ninth graders were initially administered the test that year. Thus, the passage rate for 2002 is not consistent with that of 2001 or 2003, and thus cannot be seen as an accurate representation of student performance.

The findings for student ELA performance on the CAHSEE are consistent with the findings presented in the literature review, as it has been determined that a more thorough instruction in content standards has led to increased performance on the CAHSEE. Thus, a higher passage rate on the ELA component of the CAHSEE is consistent with the state's overall increase in students passing the ELA portion of the CAHSEE on their first attempt.

Figures for the mathematics component of the CAHSEE also reveal an encouraging upswing in percentage of passing students. In 2001, 56% of all students who took the CAHSEE passed the mathematics section. This rate jumped to 68% in 2003. Again, the passage rate in 2002, a dismal 30%, reflects the scores of those students who were in effect taking the test for the second time. Those students who had successfully passed the test in 2001 were, of course, exempt from the test. These figures, unfortunately, also reflect conclusions of the literature review, which are that students are

not faring as well on the mathematics portion of the CAHSEE as they are with the ELA portion.

Lastly, data from the first three CAHSEE administrations reveal a sobering trend discussed in the literature review: subgroupings of special education and English learner students are not performing as well on the test. Passage rates for special education students in the Folsom Cordova Unified School District rose from 40% in 2001 to 46% in 2003 for the ELA component, and from 11% in 2001 to just 17% in 2003 for the mathematics component. These figures are, once again, consistent with the review of the literature, which clearly indicates a need for intensive remediation in standards-based curriculum for special-needs students.

There is, however, some encouragement in the figures for English learners. While just 16% of those students for whom English is a second language passed the ELA section in 2001, 36% of English learners passed in 2003. It is also heartening to note that English learners have shown consistent improvement in mathematics, rising from a 15% passage rate to 44% in 2003. These figures bode well for those students for whom English is not their primary language and who already face challenges not encountered in the general student population.

Summary of CAHSEE Administration Findings

While it is clear from the data of the first three CAHSEE administrations in the Folsom Cordova Unified School District that work still must be done in ensuring that all students clear this testing hurdle, it is encouraging to note that students are faring increasingly better in their first attempts of the test. The data shows that students are passing at higher rates in both the ELA and the mathematics sections since the test's inception in 2001, and that all passage rates for both ELA and mathematics either meet or exceed state passage rates. This indicates that students in the Folsom Cordova Unified School District are being asked to assume the same degree of responsibility and face the same consequences for failure as their counterparts across the state.

In addition, it is clear that students from at-risk groups, such as special education and English learner students, are not as successful with the CAHSEE as those students in the general population. Special-needs students, although faring slightly better in 2003 than in 2001, are still doing poorly on the test, while English learners, while showing improvement, are still not passing with the same rates as those in the general student population. Especially bothersome is the disparity in the ELA passage rate (85% of all students in 2003 compared to 46% of English learners). This discrepancy must be heeded and fully addressed if the CAHSEE is to be seen as a fair testing document for all students in California.

Chapter 4

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study has examined the extent to which the implementation of content standards-driven curriculum in secondary mathematics and English language arts (ELA) has led to student success on the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE). The study was done in order to test the hypothesis that the increased focus on alignment of ELA and mathematics curriculum has led to higher passing rates for students who have been exposed to standards-based curriculum and instruction. The advent of content standards-based instruction has changed the entire structure of California's K-12 instruction. Moreover, the connection between these standards and the CAHSEE, which has been modeled entirely upon these standards, stand as the newly formed cornerstone of the processes of instruction, curriculum development and implementation, and testing and assessment. By recognizing trends in curriculum and instruction and their connection to a true and valid assessment of what is actually being taught, it is hoped that the components of curriculum, instruction, testing, and assessment will endure as valid components of the educational puzzle.

The review of related literature revealed the recent history and development of academic content standards in California, as well as the development and implementation

of the CAHSEE as a more accurate and authentic assessment of student knowledge and skills. With the investment of billions of dollars in the development and implementation of standards-based curriculum, instructional materials, as well as reward, incentive, assistance, and intervention programs in the mid- to late 1990's, the state completely revamped its approach to curriculum and instruction. Content standards were borne of a need to provide consistency and rigor for the core curriculum areas of reading, writing, mathematics, history, social studies, and science for grades K-12.

A new assessment and testing system, the culmination of which became the CAHSEE, was designed in the hopes of providing a more streamlined and more meaningful connection between instruction and assessment. As test scores have become increasingly crucial in the perception of our schools system's success or failure, this restructuring of the instruction and assessment procedures has given credence to, not only how and what are children are taught, but how they are being tested.

Purposes of assessment are as varied as the types of testing that have stood as the measuring sticks in our educational system; it is important to note that research indicates that the most valid assessment is that which bears a direct link between assessment and the standards that drive curriculum and instruction. Research also indicates that this brand of standards-based assessment provides a much more accurate and valuable portrait of what students are genuinely learning, as evidenced by the connection of assessment to curriculum and instruction.

The impact of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) Act of 2001, the federal act that has at its core five basic tenets designed to improve the quality of education for all

students in the United States, has had a profound impact on the establishment and implementation of uniform, rigorous content standards and assessment aligned to these standards. It has been determined that the mandate that all students, including special needs and English learner students, will attain proficiency status in mathematics and reading by 2014, will be addressed predominantly by the CAHSEE, as this exam tests a minimum competency in the core subjects of ELA and mathematics beginning with the class of 2006. By so doing, California's compliance with the myriad provisions of NCLB encompasses the overhaul of standards-driven curriculum and instruction as well as a system of assessment that reflects this.

Because the CAHSEE has only been in effect since 2001, limited research has been done on the connection between the integration of academic content standards and passing scores on the CAHSEE. It has been determined, however, that coverage of the specific California content standards assessed by the CAHSEE at the secondary level has increased in the past four or five years, and that this increase in coverage has led to higher passage rates on the CAHSEE. All groups tested, including students targeted as economically disadvantaged, English learners, and special education, have shown a rise in test scores since the first administration of the test in 2001. Cumulative passing rates have risen from about 50% to just over 80% in less than two years. This is, at the very least, encouraging data for educators, students, and policymakers who uphold the CAHSEE has an important measurement of assessment and as a high school graduation requirement.

An integral finding for the purposes of this study revealed that passing rates in the Folsom Cordova Unified School District have indeed risen since the test's first administration in 2001. All groups studied, including special-needs students and English learners, have fared better with the CAHSEE since the implementation of standards-based curriculum. Although special-needs students and English learners are not passing the test at the same rate as that of the general population students, the data is, at the very least, heartening.

Conclusions

Based upon the review of related literature and the data analysis, conclusions regarding academic content standards in English language arts and mathematics and their connection to student passing rates on the CAHSEE may be reached. The purpose of this study was to determine the extent to which the implementation of content standards-driven curriculum in secondary mathematics and ELA has led to student success on the CAHSEE. The hypothesis to be tested was whether or not the increased focus on alignment of ELA and mathematics curriculum has had a positive impact on the CAHSEE passage rate with those students who have been exposed to standards-based curriculum and instruction. Conclusions will be presented in three components: principal survey responses, teacher survey responses, and data analysis of CAHSEE administrations in the Folsom Cordova Unified School District.

Tables 1-3 (see pages 40-45) illustrate the major findings of the principal survey. Firstly, it can be concluded that the majority the secondary site principals representing

both comprehensive and the four alternative secondary sites in the district generally agree that efforts have been made to implement ELA and mathematics content standards at their site. There is a general consensus that teachers are being given adequate or more than adequate preparation for student instruction geared toward success on the CAHSEE. Table 1 (see page 40) presents this data in further detail. In addition, principals generally agree that students at their site have at least general knowledge of the CAHSEE, although alternative principals split on what students know regarding more specific CAHSEE information. Table 2 (see page 43) presents these findings in more complete detail. Both principals at the comprehensive sites agree that students are not only aware of the test, but they are aware of exact testing dates, the number of times they are allowed to take the test, and that the class of 2006 will have to pass the CAHSEE in order to receive a diploma. Alternative principals cited mixed views; sites are split regarding their student body's knowledge of the test. Table 3 (see page 45) concerns the factors that have led to increased awareness of the CAHSEE among the faculty and student body. Principals cite such factors as increased communication at both the district and site levels, increased coverage of the CAHSEE in the news media, and alignment of ELA and mathematics curriculum to content standards as important. Test preparation was also cited as a positive contributing factor to increased awareness of the CAHSEE.

Secondly, results of the teacher survey reveal that a majority of the comprehensive and alternative-site English 9, English 10, and Algebra I teachers who completed the questionnaire concur that an adequate number of activities and materials have been provided to teachers who are responsible for preparing students for the

CAHSEE. Among these are professional workshops and conferences, test preparation material, study guides and other CAHSEE-related curriculum, and district-sponsored workshops and opportunities for professional development. Table 4 (see page 51) provide specific details regarding this finding.

Furthermore, Table 5 (see page 52) reveals that teachers agree that students are being either "prepared" or "well prepared" for the CAHSEE. Reasons for their responses ranged from their experiences collaborating with other teachers to an alternative site teacher's observation that, despite a student clientele that has historically been unsuccessful in school, the district is preparing alternative students for the CAHSEE.

In addition, teachers believe that the materials they use in their classrooms have been adequately aligned to the content standards. These materials, including textbooks, instructional materials, and supplementary materials used in instruction are mostly aligned to the content standards that form the blueprint for the CAHSEE, said a majority of the teachers.

Finally, the data analysis from the first three administrations of the CAHSEE reveals a conclusion that proves the hypothesis: an increased concentration on standards-based curriculum in secondary ELA and mathematics has raised passage rates on the CAHSEE for students in the Folsom Cordova Unified School District since the test's first administration in the spring of 2001. Table 6 (see page 56) supports the hypothesis that passage rates for all students taking the exam for the first time have scored successively higher on the test on both the ELA and the mathematics components. Special education students and English learners, two groups which have come under scrutiny of

standardized testing opponents, are faring better as well, although as subgroups they are not performing at the same level as their mainstreamed counterparts. This data is consistent with the review of the literature, which revealed that California's students are passing at a higher rate than they were in 2001; this trend is largely attributed to the push to align all secondary ELA and mathematics curriculum to the content standards. This data also supports the conclusions found in the literature: subgroups such as English learner and special-needs students are not passing the CAHSEE as successfully as the general population. Thus, it can be concluded that these students must be provided with remediation and intensive curricular programs that will help them master, to a level of minimum competency, the knowledge and skills needed to be successful on the CAHSEE.

Recommendations

This study has tested and proven the hypothesis that curriculum and instruction in secondary English language arts and mathematics that has been rigorously aligned to academic content standards is an integral component in student success on the California High School Exit Exam. A review of related literature and a study and analysis of data collected from ninth and tenth grade-level ELA and algebra teachers in the Folsom Cordova Unified School District has substantiated the hypothesis that an inexorable link exists between the delivery of curriculum that is soundly based in the content standards and how well a student fares on the CAHSEE.

California's K-12 educational system is at an unprecedented juncture, especially in the areas of accountability, testing, and assessment. Public perception of education hinges today more than ever on test scores and their ultimate validity in a student's overall educational success or failure. The establishment of the federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 has brought to light several of our nation's educational shortcomings and has, among other things, mandated that all students will graduate from high school and will be reading at grade level by 2014. Linked to this legislation—and prompted by the push for standards-based systemic reform begun in the mid-1990's—California's school system has faced an overhaul of monumental proportion. Coupled with the push in the late 1990's to create a more valid testing and assessment program that is connected to these academic standards, the development and implementation of the CAHSEE has instituted a clear and comprehensive system of assessment that is truly linked to what a high school ELA and mathematics student should know and be able to do. All students, teachers, and administrators will henceforth be held accountable—and rightfully so—for what is being taught in the classroom and the knowledge and skills that will be carried beyond the classroom into real-life experiences. With this in mind, several key recommendations stemming from this study can be made.

Firstly, it is imperative that school districts, including the Folsom Cordova Unified School District, continue to take stock of the needs of ELA and mathematics teachers, and, in turn, the students in the alignment of curriculum and instruction to content standards and in test preparation for the CAHSEE. As the CAHSEE is a testing document still in its infancy, changes to both the testing document and the set of content standards which set the foundation for the test must be heeded and the appropriate

adjustments made to curriculum and instructional practices. For example, the State Board of Education's decision in July 2003 to streamline the CAHSEE from a three- to a two-day test, thus eliminating a portion of the objective questions and one of the two essay prompts, could be just one of the myriad alterations made to the test. Administrators and curriculum specialists much ensure that classroom teachers are kept abreast of these changes, and that needed revisions are made to existing test preparation materials and curriculum. In addition, ELA and mathematics teachers should continue to be given professional growth through department and district in-services geared specifically toward teacher and student preparation for the CAHSEE.

A second recommendation centers upon those at-risk groups who are not performing as well on the CAHSEE as their regular education counterparts. As test data has revealed, students scores are increasing with each successive CAHSEE administration. Although this also holds true for students with special needs, for English learners, and for ethnic minorities such as Hispanic and African American students, it is clear from the data that these subgroups are in need of remediation and intensive instruction if they are to attain the same passage rate as students in the general population. Thus, this author recommends that a careful and thorough repertoire of intensive remediation be provided for these subgroups and that this remediation, in the form of special tutoring, remediation programs, and additional standards-based curriculum and instructional materials, be implemented and closely monitored by highly qualified and well trained curriculum specialists. In certain cases, as the law allows, specific accommodations to the test should also be made, as the test is already being challenged by parents and advocates of special education students.

Lastly, this author feels compelled to bring to light a disturbing trend among administrators: simply put, to blame teachers if student performance falls short of the mark. It is simplistic at best to place all blame for student failure upon teachers who, for the most part, are trying their best to teach students who may or may not be receptive to the curriculum. It is taking the easy way out to blame teachers who are perceived as recalcitrant, even unprofessional. It is shocking, to say the least, to hear the political tongue wagging and to bear witness to the collective finger pointing, oftentimes straight toward the classroom teacher who teaches the low-performing student. "What are they doing wrong?" is sometimes the unspoken question, when the real question should be, "What are we doing wrong?"

It is this author's belief that no single individual is responsible for sagging test scores or a student's failure to succeed. Thus, it is recommended that all stakeholders in this new arena of standards-driven instruction and testing lay to rest those huge foam fingers and begin to work collaboratively in support of students, parents, and all educators toward a better future in California's educational system. The CAHSEE is a valuable and meaningful testing document that deserves cogent preparation on the part of both teachers and parents. However, it will only be through collaborative effort,

Appendix A

SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE
LETTER OF REQUEST

Survey Questionnaire
The California High School Exit Exam: A Blueprint for Success

Respondent: I am currently completing my master's in educational leadership at CSU, Sacramento and would like to use your feedback as part of my data collection.

The topic of the thesis, the extent to which content standards have been integrated into the grade 9 and 10 English language arts and Algebra 1 curriculum and how successfully this standard alignment has prepared the student for the CAHSEE, touches upon mostly untrod ground. Thus, your feedback and attitudes regarding curriculum in your classroom and how successfully it is working is valuable, both in its connection to a testing measurement that is still in its infancy and its validity in measuring the efficacy of standards-based curriculum.

Please take a few minutes to respond to the attached survey. You may return the completed questionnaire to my mailbox at Cordova High School or deliver to Room E13 at your convenience.

All responses will remain confidential.

With many thanks,

Donna Thayer
English teacher
Cordova High School

Appendix B

PRINCIPAL SURVEY

Principal's Survey Questionnaire
The California High School Exit Exam:
A Blueprint for Success

Directions: Please respond to the following information regarding implementation of content standards-driven curriculum in English language arts and mathematics and the California High School Exit Exam.

Part 1: General Information/School Demographics

School name_____

Number of years I have served as principal at this site _____

Number of years I have been in the Folsom Cordova Unified School District _____

My school is a/an comprehensive alternative site. (Please circle one)

The student population at my site is _____.

The number of faculty at my site is _____.

Part 2: ELA/Mathematics Content Standards

1. Indicate by circling each the specialized educational programs are currently offered at your site.

- GATE/Advanced Placement
- Remedial-level courses
- Reading remediation
- English language learner (ELL)
- School/Community partnerships
- Academic and/or themed academies

- Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID)
- Tutorial (after-school drop-in program)
- Special Education/RSP
- College-credit courses offered during the regular academic day

2. Please describe below the general academic atmosphere of your school site.

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3. What efforts have been made at either a site or district level to implement the ELA and mathematics content standards? Please indicate by circling activities below.

    - Professional development offered at site/district level for ELA/mathematics teachers
    - Professional development offered through off-site organizations (i.e. County Office of Education) for ELA/mathematics teachers
    - Development of pacing guides that align curriculum to content standards
    - Purchase of curriculum aligned to ELA/mathematics content standards
    - Development of new curriculum aligned to ELA/mathematics content standards
    - Alignment of existing curriculum to ELA/mathematics content standards
    - Implementation of consistent grade-level meetings for ELA/mathematics teachers

4. How effective have these endeavors been in the thorough and effective implementation of ELA/mathematics content standards? Please support your response.

Very effective Somewhat effective Not effective

5. In your opinion, how completely have English language arts and mathematics content standards been integrated into curriculum at your site/district? Please circle the most appropriate response.

- Standards have been partially implemented into the ELA/mathematics curriculum.

  ELA Mathematics Both Neither

- Standards have been completely implemented into the ELA/mathematics curriculum.

  ELA Mathematics Both Neither

- Standards have not been implemented into the ELA/mathematics curriculum.

  ELA Mathematics Both Neither

6. In your view, how thoroughly have ELA and mathematics teachers "bought in" to the implementation of standards-based curriculum? Please support your response.

Part 2: The California High School Exit Exam

1. How aware are students at your school site about the CAHSEE? Please circle all appropriate responses.

   - They know nothing about the exam
   - They have only general information about the exam
   - They are aware of the knowledge and skills that are covered by the exam.
   - They are aware that content standards are linked to the CAHSEE
   - They are aware of testing dates.
   - They know how many times they are allowed to retake the test if they fail the first time.
   - They know that they MUST pass the CAHSEE in order to receive a high school diploma.

2. In your opinion, what is the percentage of students in ninth and tenth grade English and Algebra 1 who have the necessary knowledge and skills to pass the CAHSEE?

   _____ per cent

3. In your opinion, how aware of the CAHSEE are parents of these students? Please support your response.

4. Has awareness of the CAHSEE within the faculty and the student body of your school site increased from March 2001, the first administration of the exam, to March 2003, the most recent administration of the exam? Why or why not?

5. If you responded "yes" to #4, what factors, in your view, have contributed to this increased awareness?

- Increased communication at the district office level
- Increased communication at the site level
- Increased school-to-home communication at either site or district level
- Increased coverage in the news media
- Alignment of content standards to ELA and mathematics curriculum
- Test preparation done in the classroom
- School-wide test preparation

6. Describe your reaction to your school site's March 2003 performance on the CAHSEE. Please support your response.

7. How does your site's March 2003 performance compare to previous performances?

- March 2001

- March 2002

8. In your view, what are the contributing factors to the increased or decreased scores on the CAHSEE?

Thank you for your time and invaluable input. Your responses will be kept confidential and will be used for data analysis purposes only.

Appendix C

TEACHER SURVEY

Survey Questionnaire
Population:
Folsom Cordova Unified School District
Secondary English 9 and 10 English Language Arts/
Mathematics teachers

Please complete the following questions by circling your most appropriate response as a teacher in secondary ninth and/or tenth grade teacher in English language arts or mathematics. Your responses will be kept confidential and are being used for data analysis purposes only.

1. The primary subject that I teach is

Mathematics

English language arts (English 9 and/or 10)

2. I have taught this subject for the following number of years:

1-5 6-10 11-15 16+

3. I spend the following number of hours per week instructing my students using curriculum that has been specifically prepared to align with the California ELA or mathematics content standards:

1 hour 2-3 hours 3+ hours

4. Textbooks used in my classroom have been aligned to the California content standards.

Yes No I am unsure.

5. Supplemental materials used in my classroom are specifically aligned to the content standards.

Yes No I am unsure

6. I am aware of the most recent pass rate on the English language arts component of the CAHSEE:

Yes; the pass rate is _____ per cent No

7. I am aware of the most recent pass rate on the mathematics component of the CAHSEE:

Yes, the pass rate is _____ per cent. No

8. Please circle the activities/materials that have been provided by your school district so that you as a classroom English or mathematics teacher may best serve your students in CAHSEE preparation:

- Professional workshops/conferences
- Test preparation material
- Curriculum specifically designed for CAHSEE test preparation
- Student study guides and/or lesson plans or activities specifically geared toward the CAHSEE
- Teacher guides and other information designed by such organizations as the Sacramento County Office of Education and the State Department of Education
- District-sponsored workshops/professional development

9. I feel confident that my students are being prepared for success on the California High School Exit Exam.

Yes No Unsure

Please state your reason(s) for your response in the space below:

_____

_____

_____

10. Based upon your knowledge and expertise as a classroom teacher, as well as your knowledge of student preparation in feeder schools, how well do you think students are being prepared in ELA and mathematics for success on the CAHSEE?

Extremely well prepared

Well prepared

Prepared

Not well prepared

Not at all prepared

Please support your response in the space below.

11. In your opinion, has the alignment of content standards to curriculum in English language arts and mathematics had a favorable impact on CAHSEE test scores?

Yes No Unsure

12. What can be done in the future to assist students in successful passage of the CAHSEE?

- Further professional development for teachers
- Continued alignment of standards in ELA and mathematics curriculum

- Investment in standards-aligned textbooks and supplementary curriculum
- Summer school and/or after-school programs for students in need of remediation

Thank you for the time and thought put into your responses. Please return to Donna Thayer at Cordova High School (Room E13 or my mailbox).

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